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"JOURNALISTIC COMRADE": ELIZA OTIS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF A NEWSPAPER DYNASTY

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Abstract

Arguing that American newspaper dynasties seldom have been studied in terms of the families that founded and maintained them, this paper examines the family origins of the powerful Otis/Chandler Los Angeles Times dynasty. It focuses on the growing newspaper involvement of Eliza Otis (wife of Harrison Gray Otis), beginning in the mid-1870s, when she started working at her husband's Santa Barbara Press.

A true partner to her husband--and deeply loved by him--she took control of the Press while he was away, wrote extensively for both the Press and the Times (which she joined, with her husband, in 1882), and was a Times editor, columnist and editorial writer for more than two decades. The personal, practical, societal and journalistic circumstances that apparently most encouraged her work are explained, and the importance of her extensive newspaper involvement to the dynasty she and her husband began is discussed.

This study of Eliza Otis is used to show the importance of understanding the roles of female family members--especially publishers' wives--in the perseverence of newspaper dynasties. It ends with suggestions on emphases and sources likely to be most useful in the study of other newspaper dynasties.

Like many major American newspapers, the Los Angeles Times has been controlled by members of a single family for most of its history. Journalist David Halberstam described this family as a "dynasty" with a "power and reach and role in Southern California . . . beyond the comprehension of Easterners."[1] Fittingly, then, in recent years good research has been done on this dynasty's four successive male publishers: Harrision Gray Otis, who took over the 8-month-old paper in August 1882; his son-in-law, Harry Chandler; his son, Norman Chandler; and his son, Otis Chandler.[2]

Yet it seems doubtful that family-controlled businesses can prosper for several generations solely through the work of men. Rather, such dynasties would seem to require female family members who nurture a personal environment which supports the business and helps prepare the next generation to enter it. Economic hardships and other factors also might lead women to take more active roles in these family operations.

Despite the number and prominence of American newpaper dynasties, though, journalism historians seldom have examined them within a family context or paid serious attention to the behind-the-scenes roles of female family members. Similarly, the more visible contributions of these women as newspaper workers and decision-makers have received little attention.[3] As a result, our pictures of most family-controlled newspapers are incomplete.

This paper argues for the importance of understanding women's roles in newspaper families by re-examining the beginnings of Southern California's Otis/Chandler dynasty in terms of the activities of Eliza A. Otis, the wife of Times publisher Harrison Gray Otis. Part of a longer study of three generations of Otis/Chandler publishers' wives, mothers and

daughters, it first describes Eliza Otis' newspaper work and then analyzes that work in terms of the personal, practical, societal and journalistic circumstances that apparently encouraged it.

PRINTER AND POET

Looking back more than a half century later, Harrison Gray Otis described his marriage to Eliza A. Wetherby on September 11, 1859, as "the chief event of my life, up to this period in it."[4] At age 26, Eliza was already a published poet and better educated than her 22-year-old husband, having graduated from New Hampshire public schools and a Vermont women's seminary before following her family to Southern Ohio. In contrast, Harrison had attended log cabin rural Ohio schools until age 14, then completed eight months of advanced coursework some five years later. But he was an experienced printer who had worked in Illinois, Iowa and Ohio print shops for almost eight years.[5]

A month after their marriage in Lowell, Ohio, the couple began a pattern of separations that was to continue for more than 20 years. Harrison left Lowell to look for printing work, first in Cincinnati, then in Kentucky, where he found a job on the Louisville Journal. Eliza joined him and on March 28, 1861, gave birth to a son. The following month the family moved to Wheeling, West Virginia, where Harrison ran a small print shop.[6]

In June the couple was again separated due to another "chief event" in Harrison's life: the Civil War. He joined the Ohio infantry, quickly moving with his unit into the field. He did not return home until December, when he made what he called a "brief sad journey" to "console

with Mrs. Otis" on the death of their son.[7] Other separations and reunions followed--including one in which Harrison came home wounded and, in September 1864, witnessed the birth of a daughter, Lilian. Soon afterwards, he rejoined his unit and apparently was away for almost a year until his discharge in September 1865.[8]

By November he had settled in as editor of a Marietta, Ohio, weekly newspaper, the Washington County News. Eliza contributed poetry to the paper but probably did little additional newspaper work, since she had a young daughter to care for and, in July 1866, gave birth to another daughter, Marian.[9] The business never was profitable and Harrison was unhappy in it, remembering 1866 as the year he was "'stuck in the mud' on the job, with starvation even nearer than it was the year before."[10]

No doubt it was a relief, then, when in June 1867 he was hired as a compositor by the Government Printing Office in Washington, D.C., and was able to move his family there. He had advanced to foreman when illness forced his resignation in January 1870, but he found another good job as a clerk in the U.S. Patent Office. During this same period he edited a new newspaper, the Grand Army Times, and was a Washington correspondent for the Ohio State Journal. Eliza continued writing poetry, and in May 1871 gave birth to a third daughter, Mabel.[11]

This relatively comfortable life ended in February 1876 when Harrison resigned his Patent Office post and moved to Santa Barbara, California, with Eliza and their three daughters (a fourth daughter had been born and died early in 1875). The previous year, on a trip to Santa Barbara by himself, he had met William H. Hollister, a leading citizen who later invited Harrison to buy his newspaper, the Press, from him on credit. Thus on March 5, 1876, the Otis family landed in Santa Barbara, a town of

only 3,000 inhabitants--and three newspapers.12 Now middle-aged and the mother of three young daughters, Eliza Otis was to begin serious newspaper work.

Her husband began not only his third effort as a newspaper editor but a rapidly escalating verbal battle based on personal and political animosity. A devoted Republican in a town dominated by Democrats, Col. Otis, as he liked to be called, alienated many Santa Barbarans with his emotionally partisan coverage of the 1876 presidental campaign and his adamantly expressed political loyalties afterward. Similarly, his Press frequently insulted local groups and individuals--particularly the editors of the rival papers, the Index and the Advertiser--and he seemed to enjoy the resulting controversy. But he no doubt took less pleasure in his paper's circulation figures, which probably seldom surpassed 300.13

A local commentator writing a few years later explicitly linked the Press' caustic contents with its circulation problems when he noted that Harrison's "love of sarcasm often led him to make remarks which lessened the number of his subscribers."14 (It should be noted, though, that the Press' controversial previous editor, Joseph A. Johnson, had wielded an equally sharp pen for almost seven years.)15 But even if he had been more conciliatory it seems unlikely that Harrison's Press could have succeeded, for Santa Barbara was a small, slowly-growing town suffering hard economic times in the mid-1870s. Subscription totals also must have been affected by the fact that only about half of the town's 3,000 residents could read English.16

It is little wonder, then, that by the end of 1877 Harrison had begun looking for more profitable work elsewhere. Finally, in March 1879, he accepted a position as principal U.S. Treasury agent of the Seal Islands

in the Bering Sea. To earn his generous $3,600 yearly salary, he would oversee the local government and watchdog the operations of the company holding the islands' sealskin monopoly. On May 9 he sailed from San Francisco for Alaska, leaving the Press nominally in the hands of Gibson P. Kelly but under the ultimate control of Eliza, who also would continue her "general editorial work."[17]

"AT THE OFFICE NEARLY ALL DAY"

Eliza probably had had little time to prepare for this new responsibility, since Harrison left for Alaska less than two months after being offered the government position. However, she had the benefit of what her husband described to Press readers as her previous "active connection with the paper,"[18] for her writing had appeared in it for three years. She had most frequently contributed poetry, but she also wrote essays and did some signed local reporting. Additionally, in spring 1878 she had begun a column for women readers composed of advice and household hints, and a year later she inaugurated a children's column.[19]

But Press readers likely would have been most familiar with her series of almost 40 reports of a 1878 summer-long camping trip to Yosemite.[20] Heavily promoted by the Press, the articles apparently were popular with readers[21] and favorably described in nearby papers, with one editor calling them "equal to any series of 'woman's correspondence' I have ever seen."[22] Still, it is unlikely that Eliza had had much day-to-day practical newspaper experience, since her special interests were in writing, while during her early years in Santa Barbara she must have been busy caring for her three daughters.

Yet she soon wrote to Harrison that "everything seems moving on smoothly now,"[23] and early announced her plans to "go into the office and give my whole time to the paper" so that Gibson Kelly could concentrate on selling much-needed advertising and catching up on the accounting.[24] She reported being "at the office nearly all day," but did not complain about this schedule; "I get along with my duties very comfortably," she wrote, "and do not particularly feel the burden of office work."[25] Indeed, in late June she almost casually recounted her day this way: "I've been down to the office, written an editorial, two pages of locals, been through the exchanges, and am now home to dinner and while I wait for it I will finish my letter and get it ready for the evening mail."[26]

Certainly, the Press itself changed little with Harrison gone. It continued to carry a full front page of wire news; commentary, local news, essays and reprints from other papers on page two; and advertising on most of the final two pages (close to a page of that for Press products and services). The paper also continued its adamant support of Republican political issues, with Kelly apparently doing most of this writing. Eliza admitted to Harrison, though, that readers had told her "they miss your vigorous pen, for Kelly's is feeble, and without force or strength."[27]

Kelly seems to have been less feeble in what Eliza called his "schemes," for her letters were full of descriptions of attempts by Harrison's "enemies" to persuade Kelly to run material in support of their causes.[28] He was particuarly pressured to support the mayoral campaign of Jarret T. Richards, a former editor of a rival newspaper, the Times, and he was tempted to acquiesce.[29]

In May, Kelly tried to rent out the Press' facilities to a group trying to start an oppposition paper during the summer's political

campaign. Eliza stopped it, accusing him of being taken in by an "underhanded, false, treacherous, malicious" effort to "injure my husband personally and destroy the influence of the Press." Although she reported that Kelly "seemed to accept what I said to him in good part," she admitted that "I did hate to say it. I had to struggle with myself for courage to be plain, decided and unsparing."[30]

While restraining Kelly from such activities, Eliza also had to pressure him to carry out the tasks for which he had been hired. She was impatient with his slow progress in providing financial accounts for the business, with the high labor costs he let accumulate, and with his weak efforts to increase the Press' advertising.[31] "He lacks promptness," she explained.[32]

But despite these problems and concerns, Eliza consistently reassured her husband that she could handle the business. Her letters contained few complaints about day-to-day work; instead, they matter-of-factly described her decisions and actions. She also stressed the positive results of dealing with difficulties, explaining that "perhaps experience will give me more executive ability, and thus be a benefit to me.[33]

NEW PROBLEMS WITH THE PRESS

Harrison returned to Santa Barbara in mid-August, beginning a nine-month leave of absence from his Alaskan duties. He immediately joined the local political battle, helping defeat Jarret T. Richards' efforts to become mayor but failing to stop another editor, Warren P. Chase of the Independent, from being elected to the state senate. Harrison then increased his attacks on Chase--delighting in what he once

called "the skinning of one California editor by another"[34]--while Chase fought back through the Independent.[35] Eliza's work also appeared frequently in the Press that fall and winter. In addition to regularly producing poetry and her two columns, she wrote extensively about Los Angeles and the Southern California Horticultural Fair which took place there in October.[36]

The Press' financial position, though, still did not improve. In August 1879 non-advertising local businesses were warned that "it becomes monotonous, after three years and a half, for a publisher to furnish, at a loss, a newspaper,"[37] while telegraph news became too costly to run in early October.[38] Finally, on February 13, 1880, the Press carried this "Special Notice" signed by Harrison: "On the first day of March, 1880, I will relinquish control of the SANTA BARBARA PRESS, and transfer it to other hands. . . . Persons indebted to the office are urgently desired to make immediate settlements and payments."

These "settlements and payments" became Eliza's responsibility after her husband left for Washington, D.C., in early March, returning only briefly to Santa Barbara before sailing for Alaska in late April.[39] During his first absence the Press' new publisher, R.D. Bogart, ran an announcement stopping Harrison's collections.[40] Eliza responded in the rival Independent with a defense of her husband's right to money owed him, leading Bogart to explain that he had no "personal or business controversy with Mrs. Harrision Gray Otis" and would wait to settle things with her husband when he returned from Washington.[41] But Harrison refused to see the new publisher before leaving for Alaska, and Bogart quickly attacked him for hiding "behind 'a brave woman's' petticoat." Bogart also asked: "Is it honorable to charge a blunderbuss with mud, train it on a person's

back, and then having put thousands of miles between you and the victim, get your wife to touch it off?"[42]

The spring and summer of 1880 must have been difficult for Eliza. Her letters to Harrison show that she was unable to make any collections, was forced to refund some pre-paid subscriptions[43] and had to face Bogart's "frequent attacks . . . upon you and upon me."[44] Harrison declared himself "deeply indebted to you, dear wife, for your gallant, well-timed and effective defense,"[45] and asked her to work through these problems as best she could: "If you will hang to this mean business yet a little longer, and finish it for me, I will be prouder than ever of you, and always your debtor for your part in it."[46]

Harrison's letters also contained--as they had the previous summer--pleas that Eliza join him in Alaska and suggestions as to how she might make the journey.[47] But he initially thought he might be back by October,[48] and this hope no doubt helped keep her in Santa Barbara. She also may have been held there by a desire to resume newspaper work. Thus, in mid-May she told her husband, "I miss my Press work of last summer,"[49] and she began writing for the Independent two weeks later.[50] Around this same time she was pleased to report:

> I am told by those who profess to know, that a week will close him (Bogart) up here. I've promised to do the editorials if he goes, till someone else can be found to take the paper, but I am not to be held financially responsible for anything. This understanding is to be in black and white. But it will take hard work to put the Press back where you left it.[51]

She was only a few weeks off in her estimate of the Press' longevity; on June 30 readers learned that "with this issue, the DAILY SANTA BARBARA PRESS ceases to exist." It was not published again until September 3, when it reappeared under a new owner.[52] By that time, Eliza and her

daughter Mabel had already sailed for Alaska. There they joined Harrison for the "long semi-arctic winter," staying through the following August, when the three returned to Santa Barbara.[53]

After more than a year's absence, Harrison had succeeded in his efforts to "shake the dust of Santa Barbara journalism off my feet."[54] He spent the next few months completing his Treasury Department report while trying to obtain another government position. By January 1882, though, he also had interviewed for a job at the month-old Los Angeles Times. After more negotiations, on August 1, 1882, he joined the paper as editor with a one-fourth partnership in the business.[55] Two of Eliza's poems (including one about Alaska) and two articles by her also were published in the Times that spring.[56]

A LOS ANGELES NEWSPAPER PARTNERSHIP

Like Santa Barbara when the Otises arrived, Los Angeles in 1882 was in many ways still a frontier town. Its population was four times Santa Barbara's--around 12,000--but at least three-fourths of these people could not read English. Like Santa Barbara, Los Angeles had no paved streets, Democratic-controlled politics and three newspapers competing for limited readership. But Los Angeles' future looked much brighter than the other city's, for the railroad had arrived in 1876, bringing with it population growth, land and agricultural development, and increasing commercial prosperity. Much more than Santa Barbara, Los Angeles seemed a city of opportunity and promise.[57]

Harrison Gray Otis' situation also was quite different than it had been in Santa Barbara. When he arrived in Los Angeles his record as a

newspaper editor still was undistinguished and his financial situation was little better, but the Times already had a firm advertising base.[58] And Harrison must have counted among his assets his wife, who now had considerable newspaper experience.

Indeed, until Charles Lummis joined the paper in February 1885, Eliza was the paper's only editorial employee. Contemporaries noted that in addition to doing local reporting and writing poetry, she was the society, literary, dramatic and "household" editor, also writing a regular travel column and columns for children and women readers.[59] In April 1886, after Harrison bought out his remaining partner, Eliza became a co-owner and one of four members of the board of directors; the next year she became an editorial writer.[60]

All three daughters began working as clerks in the paper's business office in 1882, with Marian going on to become the business office secretary and a member of the board of directors and its secretary. In August 1894 she married the Times' most promising employee, its circulation superintendent, Harry Chandler.[61]

Two years later the Times' circulation was 18,000--double that of any other Los Angeles daily--and it carried more advertising than the city's three other dailies combined (in part because of its very low rates). By 1900, it was the country's largest newspaper in terms of size, led all papers in advertising lineage and had a circulation of 26,000--nearly twice the combined totals of Los Angeles' three other papers.[62]

At this time, Eliza was writing the "art and artists" column as well as a regular Sunday magazine column and poem, and remained an editorial writer and member of the board of directors. She wrote almost daily for the paper until she died on November 12, 1904.[63] Harrison called the

death of this "dear companion, ever-ready co-worker" and "journalistic comrade"[64] his "greatest personal loss."[65]

Yet, despite his sorrow, by the time of Eliza's death Harrison must have been confident that the Times' future as a family-owned paper was secure. Harry Chandler had run the business when his father-in-law fought in the Philippines in 1898 and 1899, then moved into the position of assistant general manager. And by 1904 Marian had given birth to four children, one of whom, Norman, would take over from his father as Times publisher in the early 1940s. Norman also would marry a woman, Dorothy Buffum, who would become in many ways a partner to her publisher-husband--and a reflection of Eliza Otis.[66]

ANALYSIS: THE ORIGINS OF A CAREER AND A DYNASTY

The California roots of the Otis/Chandler dynasty, it has been shown here, were laid down in Santa Barbara soil and nurtured both by Eliza Otis and by her much better-known husband. Here Eliza first wrote regularly for a newspaper, took charge of it during her husband's initial absence, and stayed to face his business and personal problems when he left for Alaska the second time. Much of this must have been witnessed by her daughters, who may have been particularly close to her because their father was so frequently gone.

It makes sense, then, that all three daughters would work at the Times, since they would have been drawn into the business by both parents, who spent long hours there. It also is little wonder that Marian, the daughter most active at the paper (she had joined the board of directors in late 1889), married the Times' most ambitious and capable employee.

Nor is it surprising that the oldest son of this union would grow up in an environment which would prepare him to become the Times' publisher, and that he in turn would choose a strong wife. (Marian's older sister, Lilian, both married early--in 1886--and died early--in 1906.67 Thus, she had little involvement in the family business. Her younger sister, Mabel, was a director of the Times Mirror Company for almost 40 years and active in Los Angeles cultural affairs.68)

The logic of Eliza Otis' newspaper work is more complex, but it becomes clearer when that work is examined against the background of her personal life, of the practical needs of the Press and Times, and within the context of women's history and journalism history of the period. Such analysis makes it possible to piece together the most likely reasons for her expanding career as a journalist.

"BE SOMETHING MORE"

Personal values, abilities and circumstances probably were the most influential factors in Eliza's partnership with her husband. That she developed early as a poet no doubt is especially important; she had written poetry, and published it in newspapers, since well before her marriage, so it is logical that she would continue this kind of writing for her husband's papers. That at the Press this writing should broaden to include columns for women and children also is understandable, since these took a personal, non-journalistic form (sometimes incorporating poetry) and dealt with subjects that a wife and mother would have been considered qualified to address.

Beyond this, she seems to have felt a need to do productive work

outside of the home. As she advised her female readers in a 1879 Press column:

> Be a good cook, but be something more. To be a thorough housekeeper does not necessitate your becoming a mere domestic machine. If only the necessary demands of the appetite are supplied there will be time left over for mental growth, for the cultivation of art, music, literature.[69]

A few months later she expressed this same concern with the wider world when she wrote to Harrison, "If I could only do such work as you do--work that would tell, I would be content." But she worried that she was "good for platitudes and not much else."[70]

Clearly, too, Eliza was exceedingly hard-working. Her husband's frequent absences no doubt left her with many family responsibilities and the need to act independently. The difficult economic times the Otises had often suffered also must have left their mark on her. Writing in the summer of 1879, Harrison apologized for the most recent of those times: "You have worked so hard, sacrificed so much and enjoyed so little since we went to Santa Barbara that I am deeply anxious to so improve our condition in life so as to enable you to have some good times yet before you get old."[71]

Eliza, though, maintained that she enjoyed her intense involvement with the Press, in part because she claimed it helped her weather her separation from Harrison, "since there is nothing like good hard work when the heart is lonely.[72] Similarly, in May 1880, after admitting to Harrison that she missed her "Press work of last summer," she vowed in its place to "do all the mental work I can."[73] It makes sense, then, that she labored so intensely at the Times after Harrison became editor in 1882, for by that time she had been kept from the newspaper work she enjoyed for

two years.

One additional personal factor must have motivated Eliza to give so much effort to the Press and the Times: She loved her husband deeply and wanted to help and support him. Thus, she early wrote to him of an additional benefit of her Press work: "I begin to understand as I never did before what your business cares and burdens were. . . . These lessons make me better able to help you, and to enter into all your feelings and perplexities and struggles."[74] This love was a constant theme in her correspondence, from the first line of her first letter to Harrison in 1879--"My heart gets so hungry for you every day"[75]--to the closing of a letter sent a year later: "Now I'll kiss you good bye, with my arms about you and my heart overleaping space, beating lovingly close to your own."[76]

Ironically, the strength of that love may help explain why Eliza did not take charge of the Press again when Harrison left for Alaska in 1880. He knew the business was failing, but he also wanted her with him, especially if his stay extended beyond the summer. Still, this married closeness may well have drawn Eliza into the business on an emotional level even before she became more practically involved. And she must have enjoyed the working contact she had with her husband at the Times.

Harrison seems to have loved her equally strongly, typically telling her (after 20 years of marriage), "You are everything to me, my dear wife. You are so necessary to me that life without you has a great blank."[77] But he did not simply love her; he also loved her work, which no doubt further encouraged her to write for his newspapers. He showed his fondness for her writing by both the frequency with which he ran it in his papers and the additional comments he reprinted. For example, during the time his Press carried her reports from her Yosemite trip, it also ran

Harrison's own praise of the articles as well as complimentary letters from readers of the series and favorable reactions taken from other newspapers.[78]

Similarly, Harrison praised and encouraged Eliza's work privately, telling her of his concern that she "acquire the honest fame which I know you can win with your pen." And he pointed out one particular advantage of her joining him in Alaska: "The amount of leisure time you can have for literary work will be many times more than you have ever had at command, and you can lay out your work and do it systematically." He noted that his quarters had both an "exceedingly comfortable bed" with "just room enough for one more in it--the dear woman whom I call wife," and "a good working room for you and me."[79]

After Eliza's death Harrison continued to extol her work, remembering her as "a writer of recognized grace and power" and praising her "polished mind" and "rare intellect."[80] The following year he published a large volume of her selected poetry and other newspaper writing[81] and for many years afterward continued to reprint her poetry in the Times.[82] Not surprisingly, this devotion was mocked by some of his contemporaries, one of whom declared, "Otis became not merely a devoted American husband, but a pod-snappy admirer of her attainments. He kept, one might say, his literary taste in his wife's name."[83]

PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF ELIZA OTIS' WORK

Beyond these personal factors, the circumstances of the Press and Times also help explain the amount and kind of work done by Eliza. The Press consistently was unprofitable, while the Times, as a new paper,

struggled at first. Thus, Eliza's efforts would have helped save money--something Harrison's Santa Barbara problems must have caused him to pay particular attention to the Times. Even the writer who thought so little of Harrison's "literary taste" was impressed by the way the couple "drudged and sweated heroically" to publish the Los Angeles paper. He described Harrison working all day and then, at midnight, turning to "edit state news to save the wages of a $25-a-week copy editor."[84]

The demand for Eliza's work was even more immediate in Santa Barabara in 1879 when Harrison first went to Alaska. The paper needed a trusted overseer and Eliza was the likely choice. But her work did more than keep the Press going; it also provided her with day-to-day business experience which she seemed to increasingly enjoy, and with growing self-confidence. As a result, by the time she moved to Los Angeles she had developed what her daughter Mabel later called a "familiarity with the exigencies of newspaper production."[85]

But the practical benefits of her work went beyond money saved in salaries. Her husband has been widely described as a blustering, reactionary publisher who loved a fight and especially loved attacking his enemies in print. He held strong--and often extreme--opinions which he announced through a particularly emotional and biased form of personal journalism.[86] In contrast, Eliza was, as Harrison put it, "a noble example of the true woman, wife and mother" who "bore in her responsible breast a true and tender heart."[87] Having a "gracious personality and a joyous nature," she "wrote almost invariably in an optimistic vein."[88]

Eliza's printed work, then, may well have helped offset some of the more irritating qualities of Harrison's, and thus expanded both papers' readership. Indeed, an early Times editor who knew Eliza's writings well

claimed that they "all appealed to the better impulses and kindlier moods of her readers, and without doubt contributed as much as any single influence to the moral standing of the paper, making it a welcome visitor in the best homes."89

A similar likely effect of her Santa Barbara work is evident from an examination of the Press of July 19, 1878. Side-by-side, on the second page, appeared Harrison's column responding to criticisms of his paper and Eliza's report on part of her journey to Yosemite. Harrison raved about the "enraged, jealous, or disappointed 'outside third parties'" who resented the Press for having pointed out their "crookedness, cussedness, disgusting vanity, insufferable egotism, or what not." But in the next column Eliza called attention to "the Coast Range of mountains, their sharp peaks cutting the blue of heaven--earth's monumental spires."

WIDER INFLUENCES

Larger forces in the last quarter of the 19th Century also likely encouraged Eliza Otis' newspaper involvement. At the start of this period one of the few "respectable" careers for middle-class women was writing, since it was paid work that could be done at home without directly competing with men. It also utilized the special creative sensibilities that "ladies" were thought to have. Writers who addressed women's domestic concerns were especially popular with women readers--although not with most critics.90

Newspapers were one important outlet for these women writers' work. As the post-Civil-War popular press increasingly attempted to attract women readers, columns dealing with topics such as cooking, fashion,

household operations and society news begans to appear under women's names. Women also free-lanced essays, poetry, travel articles and other light features.[91]

All Los Angeles newspapers carried this kind of material, with poetry and travel articles apparently being especially popular.[92] Thus, Eliza's writing was in many ways typical of that by and for women appearing locally and nationally in newspapers of the period. The Times, though, seems to have run more than many papers, for a contemporary critic remarked that Eliza and Harrison "were, I believe, pioneers in devoting an unprecedented amount of space to women's guff."[93]

An appreciation of Santa Barbara and Los Angeles as western--and,to some extent, frontier--environments also helps explain aspects of Eliza's work. Many historians believe that women in western towns of this time generally were freer from traditional domestic restraints, more respected by men and more enterprising outside the home than eastern women. More "male jobs" were open to them, and professional women did particularly well.[94] This more liberal atmosphere may well have worked to Eliza's advantage by conferring social respectability on her fulltime work as a journalist.[95]

Some historians also have identified an important idealized role for western women as "tamers" of the frontier and guardians of the social, cultural and moral values of "civilization." This was especially true during the Los Angeles boom of the 1880s which attracted many middle-class emigrants--with their assumptions about women's superior virtuosness--to the city. During this time women increasingly took active parts in their community as religious leaders, educators and social reformers.[96] In many ways Eliza was similarly active when, through her writing, she contributed

"moral standing" to the Times and the city.

Scholars have cited one additional vital role for some western women: that of "helpmate" to their husbands. Often pictured as uncomplaining, industrious and resiliant, these women helped their husbands succeed by serving as their working partners while calmly seeing to the family's domestic needs.[97] Eliza clearly played this role, just as she did the role of "civilizer."

Husband-wife partnerships were common in the production of frontier newspapers. Publishers' wives were particularly likely to work in the backshop, where they set type, folded papers and did other production tasks. Until the turn of the century they much less frequently took on the kind of editorial work performed by Eliza.[98] However, their day-to-day involvement provides an important precedent for Eliza's work, especially in light of the fact that Santa Barbara and Los Angeles of the 1870s and 1880s were still in some ways frontier towns.[99] Certainly Harrison Gray Otis had many of the stereotypical frontier journalist's personality traits and values, just as during his first decade in California he confronted many of the problems typically faced by frontier journalists.[100]

Thus a range of forces and circumstances likely combined to draw Eliza Otis into journalism and to form her writing. Yet, while an understanding of these influences is important, the significance of her own steady growth as a person must not be underestimated. It is evident that, as she took on more responsibility at the Press and dealt with new kinds of problems, both her knowledge and her confidence grew. As a result, she found journalism increasingly fulfilling and continued to write for the Times long after there was any obvious financial need for

her contributions.

That her work was so personally meaningful takes on new significance in terms of the century-long dynasty that she and her husband began, for it helps explain the strength of that dynasty's origins. The Times started as a family newspaper in the most extreme sense of that phrase, and this may well be one key reason that it has prospered as a family newspaper for so long.

STUDYING OTHER DYNASTIES

These findings suggest a number of lessons for the study of other newspaper dynasties. First is that they should not be examined simply as newspapers and businesses, but also must be studied as families. In this new focus, women's roles must receive particular attention, and an understanding of these roles may lead to valuable new insights into the nature of these dynasties and how they have survived.

A second lesson is that the roots of present-day newspaper families may be especially worthy of study. As in all journalism history, such research requires that the motivations and actions of a dynasty's founders be interpreted within the social, journalistic and community contexts of the time and place in which they operated. Also important is a thorough understanding of the personal qualities and values of the founders, particularly their marital interactions.

A final lesson addresses the sources most useful for this kind of study. Personal details usually are most fully revealed in the types of sources least available to--and sometimes least valued by--journalism historians. These include personal letters, journals, autobiographies and

similar writings by family members. Researchers must work hard to locate these kinds of sources, keeping in mind the possibility that a newspaper's ownership by generations of the same family has encouraged their preservation.

This researcher was fortunate to have access to some rich personal sources, but it should be noted that most had not been well used by previous scholars to understand the members of this publishing family. Thus it seems likely that comparably valuable sources exist on other newspaper dynasties but have not yet been fully utilized.[101]

At the same time, more readily available sources can provide significant personal insights. Obituaries--most notably those appearing in the family's newspaper--often supply both relevant factual details and evidence about feelings and values. A newspaper's house organ can offer useful informal views of family members, just as its annual reports may include personally revealing statements. Similarly, published autobiographical writings, along with commentaries by friends, enemies and a newspaper's staff, can reveal much about family members' personalities, views and actions, as can the journalism produced by these family members.

Newspaper dynasties, then, can and should be better studied as family operations. Not every story will be as telling as that of Eliza and Harrison Gray Otis, just as the kind of work done by Eliza may not be typical of the contributions of late-19th-Century publishers' wives. But certainly many male publishers in newspaper families had wives who did important but less visible work as "journalistic comrades." They, too, deserve to be understood.

NOTES

[1]David Halberstam, The Powers That Be (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 94.

[2]Within the past decade, two good histories of the Times have been published: Jack Hart, The Information Empire: The Rise of the Los Angeles Times and the Times Mirror Corporation (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), and Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers and Their Influence on Southern California (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977). The sections on the Times in Halberstam's The Powers That Be also are excellent, and provide the best published material on Dorothy Buffum Chandler, the wife of Norman Chandler.

[3]An important exception to this generalization is Susan Dryfoos' version of her grandmother's memoirs, Iphigene: Memoirs of Iphigene Ochs Sulzberger of the New York Times Family (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1981).

[4]Harrison Gray Otis, "Milestones, Marking Some High Spots in the Pathway of a Strenuous Life," incomplete typescript in the Los Angeles Times Archives (hereafter referred to as LAT Archives).

[5]Richard Connelly Miller, "Otis and His Times: The Career of Harrison Gray Otis of Los Angeles" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1969), pp. 7-11; "Death Summons Noble Woman," Los Angeles Times, November 13, 1904, p. 4.

[6]Otis, "Milestones," p. 8; Miller, pp. 12-13.

[7]Otis, "Milestones," p. 8.

[8]Ibid., pp. 11-14.

[9]Ibid., p. 14; "Death Summons Noble Woman," p. 4.

[10]Otis, "Milestones," p. 14.

[11]Ibid., pp. 15-16; Miller, pp. 32-33; "Death Summons Noble Woman," p. 4.

[12]Otis, "Milestones," p. 17; Miller, pp. 35-38.

[13]Miller, pp. 47-54; Thomas M. Storke, California Editor (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1953), pp. 87-88; Walker A. Tompkins, "Santa Barbara Journalists, 1855-1973," Noticas 9 (Winter 1973): 5-6.

[14]Jesse D. Mason, History of Santa Barbara County, California, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers (Oakland, CA: Thompson and West, 1883), p. 330.

[15]Tompkins, pp. 4-5.

[16]Ibid.; Storke, pp. 87-90; Miller, pp. 53-54.

[17]"Special Announcement," Santa Barbara Press, April 14, 1879, p. 2; Miller, pp. 55-61; Mabel Otis Booth, "Women Who Made the Times," Among Ourselves, October 1947, p. 6. (Among Ourselves is the Times house organ.)

[18]"Special Announcement," p. 2.

[19]For typical examples of her poetry in the Press see May 22, 1876, July 10, 1877, October 15, 1848; for typical essays see February 8, 1877, September 13, 1877, October 16, 1878; for local reporting see June 6, 1876, and February 24, 1877. The children's column, "Our Boys and Girls," began on May 12, 1878. The woman's column, signed "Susan Sunshine," began March 7, 1878. This reseracher assumes Eliza Otis to be the author of this column since she later wrote one in the same style, covering similar subjects and under the same pseudonym in the Times.

[20]The first article in this series appeared on June 29, 1878, the last on November 2, 1878.

[21]See comments on August 7 and September 26, 1878.

[22]Untitled comments reprinted in the Press on September 27, 1879, p. 2. For other comments see the issues of September 24 and November 2, 1878.

[23]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, June 9, 1879, LAT Archives.

[24]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 20, 1879, LAT Archives.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, June 27, 1879, LAT Archives.

[27]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, June 27, 1879.

[28]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 20, 1879; June 9, 1879; June 27, 1879.

[29]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, June 27, 1879.

[30]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 20, 1879.

[31]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 20, 1879; June 9, 1879.

[32]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 20, 1879.

[33]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, June 27, 1879.

[34]Santa Barbara Press, August 21, 1879, p. 2.

[35]Miller, pp. 64-68.

[36]See issues of the Press on October 20, 22, 25, 27, 29 and 31, 1879.

[37]"To the Merchants and other businessmen of Santa Barbara," Santa Barbara Press, August 3, 1879, p. 2.

[38]The last wire news ran on October 8, 1879.

[39]Miller, p. 7.

[40]"Notice," Santa Barbara Press, April 9, 1880, p. 2.

[41]"To the Public," Santa Barbara Press, April 10, 1880,. p. 2.

[42]"Notice," Santa Barbara Press, May 8, 1880, p. 2.

[43]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 19, 1880, and June 3, 1880, LAT Archives.

[44]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, June 3, 1880.

[45]Harrison Gray Otis to Eliza Otis, May 15, 1880, LAT Archives.

[46]Harrison Gray Otis to Eliza Otis, June 15, 1880, LAT Archives.

[47]Harrison Gray Otis to Eliza Otis, May 15, 1880, June 15, 1880, and June 30, 1880, LAT Archives.

[48]Harrison Gray Otis to Eliza Otis, June 15, 1880.

[49]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 19, 1880.

[50]Miller, p. 78.

[51]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, June 3, 1880.

[52]Miller, p. 78.

[53]Otis, "Milestones," p. 19.

[54]Harrison Gray Otis to Eliza Otis, June 15, 1880.

[55]Miller, pp. 87-90; Otis, "Milestones," p. 20.

[56]"Sunland and Snowland," April 16, 1882, p. 1; "Roses Red," May 9, 1882, p. 3; "More About Rose Festival Recently Held," May 14, 1882, p. 3; "Greatness," May 27, 1882, p. 2.

[57]Hart, pp. 13-14; Storke, pp. 39, 87-88; Ed Ainsworth, "Men Who Made the Times," Among Ourselves, September 1947, p. 6; Robert V. Hine, ed; William Andrew Spalding, Los Angeles Newspaperman, (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1961), pp. 38-39.

[58]Hart, p. 16.

[59]Hine, p. 132; Harry Carr, Los Angeles: City of Dreams (New York: Gosset & Dunlap, 1935), p. 324; Louis Sherwin, "The Walrus of Moron-Land," American Mercury, February 1928, p. 192.

[60]"The TIMES-MIRROR COMPANY Reorganized," Los Angeles Times, April 9, 1886, p. 2; Agreement between Harrison Gray Otis and the Directors of the Times-Mirror Company, May 14, 1887, LAT Archives.

[61]Carr, p. 6; "The Force at Work," Los Angeles Times, July 2, 1893. Part 2, p. 11; Times-Mirror Company Annual Report, 1908, p. v, LAT Archives.

[62]Hart, pp. 22-23; Addison Archer, American Journalism From the Practical Side (New York: Holmes Publishing Company, 1897), pp. 287, 345.

[63]Booth, p. 6; Times-Mirror Company Annual Report, 1904, pp. 225-26.

[64]Harrison Gray Otis to the Rev. Robert J. Burdette, November 14, 1904, LAT Archives.

[65]Otis, "Milestones," p. 30.

[66]Hart, pp. 52-53, 89; Chandler-Otis Family Genealogy, prepared by Gwendolyn Garland Babcock, LAT Archives.

[67]Otis, "Milestones," p. 31; "Matrimonial," Los Angeles Times, September 23, 1886, p. 1.

[68]Mary Ann Callan, "4 Who Helped Shape Destiny of The Times," Los Angeles Times, Midwinter Edition, January 3, 1956, Part V, p. 210.

[69]"Susan Sunshine," Santa Barbara Press, February 28, 1879, p. 2.

[70]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 20, 1879.

[71]Harrison Gray Otis to Eliza Otis, June 15, 1879, LAT Archives.

[72]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 19, 1880.

[73]Ibid.

[74]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 20, 1879.

[75]Ibid.

[76]Eliza Otis to Harrison Gray Otis, May 19, 1880.

[77]Harrison Gray Otis to Eliza Otis, June 15, 1879.

[78]See, for example, issues of the Press on June 29, August 7, 14 and 24, September 26 and 27, November 1 and 2, 1879.

[79]Harrison Gray Otis to Eliza Otis, June 15, 1979.

[80]Times-Mirror Company Annual Report, 1904, pp. 225-26.

[81]California "Where Sets the Sun": The Writings of Eliza A. Otis In Poetry and Prose, Assembled, Arranged and Edited by Her Husband (Los Angeles: The Times-Mirror Company, 1905).

[82]Miller, pp. 254-55.

[83]Sherwin, p. 191.

[84]Ibid., p. 192.

[85]Booth, p. 6.

[86]Almost everything written about Otis repeatedly makes these points, but for good summaries see Gottlieb and Wolt, pp. 23-24, Halberstam, pp. 102-06, and Miller, pp. 508-12.

[87]Times-Mirror Company Annual Report, 1904, p. 226.

[88]California "Where Sets the Sun", p. 262.

[89]Hines, p. 133.

[90]Barbara Kuhn Campbell, The "Liberated" Woman of 1914: Prominent Women in the Progressive Era (n.p.: UMI Research Press, 1979), pp. 47, 60-61; Karen J. Blair, The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914 (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980), p. 11.

[91]Marion Marzolf, Up From the Footnote (New York: Hastings House, 1977), pp. 19-21; James Stanford Bradshaw, "Mrs. Rayne's School of Journalism," Journalism Quarterly 60 (Autumn 1983): 513.

[92]Henry Winfred Splitter, "Newspapers of Los Angeles: The First Fifty Years, 1851-1900," Journal of the West 4 (October 1963): 448.

[93]Sherwin, p. 192.

[94]Gloria Ricci Lothrop, "Westering Women and the Ladies of Los Angeles: Some Similarities and Differences," South Dakota Review 19 (Spring/Summer 1981): 43, 56. For an excellent review essay discussing major sources on women in the American west--and the many scholarly disagreements related to women's western experiences--see Paula Petrik, Feminist Studies 11 (Fall 1985): 677-94.

[95]Census figures for 1880 demonstrate how rare women journalists were. Of the 5,286 fulltime journalists recorded, only 288 were women. (Bradshaw, p. 513.)

[96]Lothrop, pp. 43, 52-54, 61; Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," Pacific Historical Review 49 (May 1980): 179.

[97]Jensen and Miller, pp. 180-81: Beverly J. Stoeltje, "A 'Helpmate for Man Indeed': The Image of the Frontier Woman," Journal of American Folklore 88 (January-March 1975): 32-38.

[98]Robert F. Karolevitz, Newspapering in the Old West (Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 119, 173-75; Robert F. Karoleritz, From Quill to Computer: The Story of America's Community Newspapers (n.p.: National Newspaper Foundation, 1985), pp. 125-31. Ishbel Ross, Ladies of the Press (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), p. 460; Joanna L. Stratton, Pioneer Woman: Voices from the Kansas Frontier (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), pp. 198-99.

[99]Splitter, p. 458; Storke, pp. 39-40; Miller, p. 3.

[100]For a good summary of the characteristics of frontier journalism and journalists, see William H. Lyon, "The Significance of Newspapers on the American Frontier," Journal of the West 19 (April 1980): 12.

[101]One example nicely illustrates this point. The three-generation Washington Post dynasty has received much scholarly attention, with Katharine Graham being of particular interest. However, her mother's very revealing autobiography has not been well utilized, even though it says much about the Meyer/Graham family and women's roles in it. (See Agnes Meyer, Out of These Roots: The Autobiography of an American Woman [Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953].)